

# Murle language

**Murle** (also Ajibba, Beir, Merule, Mourle, Murule) is a Nilo-Saharan Eastern Sudanic language spoken by the Murle people, spoken in the southeast of South Sudan, near the Ethiopian border. A very small number of Murle live across the border in southwestern Ethiopia.

They speak the Murle language, which belongs to the Southwestern branch of the Surmic languages group, within the larger Nilo-Saharan family.

The basic word order for Murle clauses is VSO (verb–subject–object).<sup>[3]</sup> The morphology of the verb agrees with the person and number of the subject, and can also indicate that of the object. Some typologically exceptional points of grammar are discussed by Arensen, et al., such as that VSO languages have been predicted to not have postpositions or final interrogatives.<sup>[4]</sup>

Marking of number on nouns in Murle is complex, with no single suffix being generally productive. Some nouns are marked with a singulative suffix, some with a plural suffix, some with both, and a few with irregular stems for each number. Arensen has proposed a set of semantically based categories (such as association with men, or with weather and seasons) to try to predict which suffixes will be used (1992, 1998).

Payne (2006)<sup>[5]</sup> has proposed analyzing some cases as examples of subtractive morphology. Payne proposes that these two forms exemplify how Murle plurals can be predicted from singular forms, but not vice versa.

*onyiit* 'rib' *onyii* 'ribs'

*rottin* 'warrior' *rotti* 'warriors'

However, the same final consonants are found in productive marking of singulative number in Majang, another Surmic language, e.g. ηεεti-n 'louse', ηεεti 'lice'.<sup>[6]</sup> Also, final *-t* has been shown to be a singulative suffix in Murle and other Surmic languages,<sup>[7]</sup> fitting the pattern of T for singular and K for plural pointed out by Margaret Bryant.<sup>[8]</sup> If these final consonants are analyzed as singulative suffixes, it means that the claim of unusual discovery of subtractive morphology in Murle is incorrect. Rather, Murle is shown to have a frequent pattern of singulative suffixes.

The New Testament has been translated into the Murle language.

## References

1. Murle (<https://www.ethnologue.com/18/language/mur/>) at *Ethnologue* (18th ed., 2015)

2. Hammarström, Harald; Forkel, Robert; Haspelmath, Martin, eds. (2017). "Murle" (<http://glottolog.org/resource/language/id/murl1244>). *Glottolog 3.0*. Jena, Germany: Max Planck Institute for

Murle	
Native to	South Sudan, Ethiopia
Ethnicity	Murle people
Native speakers	(60,000 cited 1982) <sup>[1]</sup> nearly extinct in Ethiopia
Language family	Nilo-Saharan? <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Eastern Sudanic<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Surmic<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>South<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Southwest<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li><b>Murle</b></li></ul></li></ul></li></ul></li></ul></li></ul>
Dialects	Olam (Ngalam) Omo
Writing system	Latin (in South Sudan)
Language codes	
ISO 639-3	mur
Glottolog	murl1244 ( <a href="http://glottolog.org/resource/language/id/murl1244">http://glottolog.org/resource/language/id/murl1244</a> ) <sup>[2]</sup>

the Science of Human History.

3. (Arensen 1982)
4. Arensen, Jon, Nicky de Jong, Scott Randal, Peter Unseth. 1997. "Interrogatives in Surmic Languages and Greenberg's Universals", *Occasional Papers in the Study of Sudanese Languages* 7:71–90.
5. Payne, Thomas (2006). *Exploring language structure : a student's guide* (<https://archive.org/details/exploringlanguag00payn>). Cambridge, UK New York: Cambridge University Press. pp. 44 (<https://archive.org/details/exploringlanguag00payn/page/n67>), 45. ISBN 0-521-67150-7.
6. p. 124; Bender, M. Lionel. 1983. Majang phonology and morphology. In *Nilo-Saharan Language Studies*, ed. by M. Lionel Bender, 114-147. East Lansing: Michigan State University.
7. p. 86. Unseth, Peter. 1988. Majang nominal plurals, with comparative notes. *Studies in African Linguistics* 19.1:75-91.
8. Bryan, Margaret. 1959. The T/K languages: A new substratum. *Africa* 29:1-21.

## Literature

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## External links

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- World Atlas of Language Structures information on Murle ([http://wals.info/languoid/lect/wals\\_code\\_mrl](http://wals.info/languoid/lect/wals_code_mrl))
  - Murle basic lexicon at the Global Lexicostatistical Database (<http://starling.rinet.ru/cgi-bin/response.cgi?root=new100&morpho=0&basename=new100\esu\srm&first=0>)
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